Declassified and Approved For Release 2013/02/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000605100021-0

WASHINGTON POST
18 November 1986

Reagan Has 'No Plans' To Ship Iran More Arms, But Order Still in Effect

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President Reagan said yesterday he had "absolutely no plans" to send more weapons to Iran, but White House officials said the president's secret order authorizing such clandestine shipments remains in effect and does not limit the type or quantity of weapons that could be provided.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes, explaining why Reagan has not rescinded the order, said that "the ultimate objective of the president's policy is to establish a normal relationship with Iran" similar to the ties the United States has with Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The United States supplies arms to all these countries.

Speakes said, however, that supplying additional arms to Iran "clearly awaits more positive developments," which he said included an end to the Iran-Iraq war, a halt of support for terrorist activities and release of U.S. hostages held by groups believed to have ties to Iran.

Reagan's disavowal of any intention to sell more weapons to Iran came on the heels of Secretary of State George P. Shultz's blunt criticism of a secret 18-month White House effort to open contacts with Tehran and use arms shipments as a demonstration of American good faith. Shultz, appearing Sunday on CBS' "Face the Nation," said that providing arms to Iran to send this signal was "debatable" and he indicated unhappiness with the White House defense of the sales.

White House officials moved yesterday to assert Reagan's authority over U.S. foreign policy-making, while playing down the prospect that Shultz or others might resign or be fired.

Reagan was asked at a picture-taking session whether he planned to fire Shultz because of his remarks. "I'm not firing anyone," the president responded.

A senior White House official said that "we were miffed that Shultz could not be more supportive." He said the president realized that Shultz was acting out of principle, but added that his television performance "didn't hit the applause meter at the White House."

On Sunday morning before he went on television, Shultz expressed concern that arms shipments to Iran might be continuing in an effort to free remaining U.S. hostages, aides said. Other administration sources said he had discussed the issue Saturday at Camp David with White House chief of staff Donald T. Regan and Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, national security adviser.

Sources said Shultz told Regan and Poindexter that he could not and would not defend the policy of secretly sending arms to Iran but would refrain from personal criticism of the president although he differs with Reagan's declaration that the secret contacts had borne some fruit.

In his nationally televised speech last Thursday, Reagan said that since the U.S. contacts began, "there has been no evidence of Iranian government complicity in acts of terrorism against the United States." He also pointed out that "hostages have come home."

Shultz, who has led the administration's worldwide efforts to counter terrorism, has argued that Iran's attitude toward terrorism should be measured by its actions against all nations and not just the United States. On Sunday he emphasized this, saying that "Iran has and continues to pursue a policy of terrorism."

In a speech last night in Chicago, Shultz reasserted his disagreement with the Iran arms decision and the way the White House carried out its secret diplomacy. He also maintained that he was kept in the dark, saying there was "a lot of what transpired that I don't know about."

Shultz said the public debate since the disclosure of U.S. contacts with Iran had reinforced his belief that "it's a mistake for governments to get into the business of trading something of genuine importance for hostages . . . . All you do is encourage the taking of more hostages and put more Americans at risk."

He said the United States had to continue exploring opportunities for an opening to Iran, and that he realized this must be done "quietly, privately, secretly." But he said a way had to be found "to take advantage of the checks and balances" in government as well as its "expertise," an apparent reference to the White House refusal to listen to his advice on the danger of sending arms to Iran.

The Iran policy rift has produced unusual strains within an administration that in past controversies has tried to formulate a single position that everyone supported, then launch a public relations campaign to convince the public.

Regan told The New York Times, "Some of us are like a shovel brigade that follow a parade down Main Street cleaning up. We took Reykjavik and turned what was really a sour situation into something that turned out pretty well."

At the picture-taking session yesterday, reporters mentioned Regan's remark and asked the president how "the shovel brigade" was doing. "I'll be trying to do that on Wednesday night when I meet with you," Reagan replied. He was referring to a scheduled news conference, his first since Aug. 12.

At briefings yesterday, Speakes and Charles E. Redman, the State Department spokesman, differed in their descriptions of administration decision-making processes.

"The president makes the decisions," Speakes said.

Redman said that "this building, the State Department, is the focal point of foreign policy. That includes Iran as well as all other areas of the world."

But Redman, distinguishing between the broad outlines of foreign policy and specific operations, acknowledged that the clandestine arms shipments to Iran were directed not by Shultz but by Poindexter "because the president decided that it would be" done that way.

Speakes said the secret contacts with Iran probably would be continuing had it not been for their disclosure in the Middle East, confirmed by Tehran. "Whether we have shipped additional arms, I don't know," he added.

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A The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence announced yesterday that it would hold closed hearings Friday on the Iran operation and that William J. Casey, director of central intelligence, would be the chief witness.

The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence also will meet Friday in closed session, according to a spokesman. Witnesses were not announced.

Staff writer David B. Ottaway contributed to this report.

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